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Soviet Physicist in Exchange Visit Granted U.S. Asylum in Chicago

CHICAGO, Jan. 3 (AP) — A Soviet physicist who was working in an exchange program at the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory has been granted political asylum in the United States, the Federal Immigration and Naturalization Service said today.

The 51-year-old scientist, Artem V. Kulikov, defected Christmas Eve at O'Hare International Airport as he and another Soviet physicist were about to board an airplane to return to the Soviet Union.

Dr. Kulikov is believed to be the first high-energy physicist from the Soviet Union to defect to the United States. He was granted asylum by the State Department on Dec. 26, according to a Federal immigration spokesman in Chicago who was not identified in a Chicago Tribune report of the case.

"He walked up to an immigration official at O'Hare and asked for asylum," the spokesman told The Tribune. "There was a struggle for his luggage with other Soviet scientists, and to say that they were unhappy is putting it mildly."

Meeting With Russians

Dr. Kulikov met today in Washington with officials of the Soviet Embassy, according to Cathleen Lang, a State Department spokesman. The meeting was reportedly held to assure the Russians that he was not being held against his will.

Dr. Kulikov, a senior scientist at the Leningrad Nuclear Physics Institute, was one of four Soviet physicists working on a major experiment at Fermilab, west of Chicago. The four were involved in building equipment for the experiment at the facility's atom smasher near Batavia.

Fermilab's atom smasher is the world's highest energy particle accelerator and allows physicists to measure the basic properties of matter by colliding subatomic particles at high speeds. From that, scientists can help determine the makeup of the particles and the forces that govern them.

Soviet scientists have been taking part in Fermilab programs since 1972. Dr. Kulikov had been there only three months.

"He is a well-known and very respected physicist," said Joseph Lach, a

senior scientist at Fermilab who is in charge of the project that the Soviet scientists took part in. "His defection came as a surprise to everybody."

It was the first defection in the Fermilab's 12-year program, according to Margaret Pearson, a spokesman.

Dr. Bruce Chrisman, associate director for administration at Fermilab, said Dr. Kulikov had a wife in the Soviet Union.

Dr. Lach said Dr. Kulikov had been depressed since his only child, a daughter, died in a traffic accident in Leningrad two years ago.

Anson Franklin, an assistant press secretary, said in Washington that the White House would have no comment on the defection.

A man who identified himself only as "a soldier with the military attaché" at the Soviet Embassy in Washington said no one was immediately available to comment.